'AS MYN AUCTOUR SEYTH'

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Prof. Dr. F. Mangold
Dekan

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'As myn auctour seyth'

'This storie is al-so trewe, I undertake,
As is the book of Launcelot de Lake.'

I

SPEAKING of Caxton's preface to Malory, Sir Walter Raleigh[1] says that 'history and fable, so long inextricably interwoven, are here drawing apart from one another.' These words suggest the problem of the mediaeval poet's attitude towards historical truth.

In mediaeval romance, fact and fiction were so closely blended that the school of Warton and Percy was inclined to over-emphasize the element of the fantastic-supernatural. The conception of imagination, as it was applied to romance in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, was dictated by the scale of values peculiar to the age of Dr. Johnson. 'Imagination' and its product 'fictions' evoked such epithets as 'unguided by judgment', 'calculated to captivate gross and ignorant minds', 'wild', 'monstrous'.[2] To these critics mediaeval romance appeared to be the embodiment of the qualities which Hume attributed to the imagination in the words 'Nothing is more free than the imagination of man, . . . it has unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing these ideas, in all the varieties of fiction and vision.'[3] Mediaeval romance seemed to furnish the critics with an illustration of the unbounded freedom of imagination. Percy was preoccupied with the element of 'stories of adventures, with giants and dragons, and witches and enchanters.'[4] The other factors did not so strongly attract his attention.

But the mediaeval poet, whenever he comes to reflect upon the relation of poetry to 'true history' (to cite Percy again), rejects fable and sees as his task

to make a merour only to oure mynde,
to seen eche thing trewly as it was. (Lydgate.)

The usually accepted view of the matter is that it was not until the Renaissance that the poetic attitude on the one hand, the scientific-historical on the other, acquired a definite outline of their own and that only then were the two spheres separated. Bacon, for example, stresses the fact that poetry is related to the imagination as history is to memory and philosophy to reason, and that in this way one of the three faculties of the human understanding finds its adequate expression in poetry:

Poesie is a part of Learning in measure of words for the most part restrained, but in all other points extreamely licensed, and doth truly referre to the Imagin-

[1] *The English Novel* (1894) p. 15. [2] See Percy's *Reliques*, 'Essay on the ancient Metrical Romances.
[3] *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* sect. v part 2.
[4] *op. cit.*, ed. H. B. Wheatley (1877) III 340.

ation, which, beeing not tyed to the Lawes of Matter, may at pleasure joyne that which Nature hath severed, and sever that which Nature hath ioyned, and so make vnlawfull Matches and divorses of things.[1]

This conception of the qualities peculiar to the poetic sphere forms a sharp contrast to the mediaeval view.

In the mediaeval romance we find no definite theories of the respective spheres of fact and fable in poetry, but the utterances which interrupt the flow of the narrative to assert the truth of the story throw some light upon the poet's attitude towards truth. Such assurances that the truth has been represented are usually given in short formulas. A first rough distinction might be made between two types of formulas of assertion:

Type I. Affirmation of truth (*for sothe; without lesyng*).

Type II. Reference to a source (to the species: *as the geste seyth; so ich in the brout yfinde;* or to an author). The more elaborate form of the reference to authors is the list of authorities.

The tradition of the formulas of assertion goes back to Old English hagiography. Fr. Wilhelm[2] shows, for Middle High German romance, how the pseudo-historical devices of late Antiquity penetrated into romance viâ hagiography. Similarities between romance and legends of the saints have frequently been indicated. Ælfric's Lives of the Saints abound in references to witnesses and authorities (some of them functionally justified, others documenting the miraculous); in the Life of St. Edmund he goes so far as to give a whole stemma of sources. Thus, when Geoffrey of Monmouth referred to the famous 'quendam librum . . . vetustissimum de hystoria eorum veraciter editum',[3] there already existed in English literature a certain tradition of the assertion of truth.

The Arthurian cycle shows that the author of romances claimed the same credibility as the historian; within its frame the problem of fact and fiction was first raised in historiography proper by William of Malmesbury and was then taken over into romance.

In this matter, the attitude of all the poets who later treated the Arthurian material was predetermined by the pseudo-historian Geoffrey. His habit of adapting the methods of historiography proper to the realm of romance may be illustrated by comparison with the Greek distinction between ψευδὴς and ἀληθὴς ἱστορία. A clear notion of the essence of pseudo-history had been reached in late Greek literature. A subtle method of fabrication made the late Greek authors of romances interchange the γένη, so that the ψευδὴς ἱστορία (fable, romance) appears in the garb of the ἀληθὴς ἱστορία (historio-

[1] J. E. Spingarn *Critical Essays of the 17th Century* I (1908) 5.

[2] *Antike und Mittelalter* I. *Ueber fabulistische Quellenangaben.* Paul-Braunes Beitr. XXXIII (1908).

[3] In A. Griscom's edition of the *Historia Regum Britanniæ* (1925 p. 536). As long as the existence of the 'liber vetustissimus' is unconfirmed, the treatment of Geoffrey's references as pseudo-historical devices seems to be justified.

graphy proper) with all the formulas of assertion typical of it.[1] Many late Greek romances, therefore, are called histories (e.g. *Apollonii Regis Historia*).

Old English literature had itself been influenced by the fictional methods of Greek romance; in hagiography a similar device of fiction was apparently followed even down to the details of formulas, and in the tenth century translations were made of the *Apollonii Regis Historia* and of two works related to the Alexander romance. The question whether Geoffrey was familiar with ancient pseudo-historical works seems never to have been investigated.

From Geoffrey onwards, pseudo-historical devices such as assertion of truth, rejection of fables, and reference to sources are connected with the Arthurian material, just as, in the tradition of the matter of Troy, Homer became the scapegoat of the authors' desire to assert their own veracity as against what they called fables, so a tendency developed in the Arthurian material to charge a whole people, the Celts, with mendacity. William of Malmesbury condemns Celtic Arthurian tradition as 'fallaces fabulæ' and demands 'veraces historiæ.'[2] In spite of his reverence for the 'Britannici sermonis librum' Geoffrey exercises indirect criticism by rejecting many fantastic-supernatural features of the Arthur of the Cymric tradition.[3] This tendency is also to be observed in Wace, who repeatedly condemns Celtic fables, noting the gradual transformation of history into fable:

En cele grant pais que jo di,
Ne sai se vos l'avés oi,
Furent les mervelles provées
Et les aventures trovées
Qui d'Artu sont tant racontées
Que a fable sont atornées:
Ne tot mençonge ne tot voir,
Tot folie, ne tot savoir;
Tant ont li conteor conté
Et li fableor tant fablé
Pour lor contes ambeleter,
Que tout ont fait fables sanbler.[4]

(De Lincy gives the following variant of the last two lines:

Por faire contes delitables
Que de verités ont fait fables.)

This motive of the 'mixed truth' is common to many mediaeval rejections of fables. William of Newbury analyses Geoffrey's 'composita falsitas'. Guido de Columnis, followed by Lydgate, attacks in

[1] Cf. Ed. Schwarz *Vorträge über den griechischen Roman* on Greek romance, which 'emerged partly out of deteriorated historiography' (pp. 146, 147).

[2] H. Brandenburg *Galfred v. Monmouth und die früh me. Chronisten* (Diss. Bln. 1910) p. 6.

[3] P. G. Thomas *English Literature before Chaucer* (1924) p. 77.

[4] ll. 1032 ff. Quoted from Le Roux de Lincy's edition (1838); the second volume of Ivor Arnold's edition has not been issued yet.

Homer and Ovid a tendency to what he terms 'the interweaving of truth and fables.' The source of Wace's curiously incisive definition is not known.

When the Arthurian material was taken over into the vernacular of Laȝamon's Brut, the attack against the 'feole cunne lesinge' told by the 'Bruttes' emerges again,[1] like a connecting link between historiography, pseudo-history, and romance-material in the chronicles. The motif, 'ne al soth ne al les that leod-scopes singeth',[2] is taken over from Wace; but Laȝamon leaves out Wace's remarks upon the development of fables. He asserts the truth of his story ('for that sothe stod a than writen') and continues:

> Ah Bruttes hine luueden swithe
> and ofte him on liȝeth
> and suggeth feole thinges
> bi Arthure than kinge
> that næuere nes iuurthen
> a thissere weorlde-richen.[3]

Then he turns to moral reflections. From the detached coolness of Wace we pass here into another world. These short, abruptly-joined sentences about faithfulness to the chieftain of the tribe and about love and hatred within a tribe recall Germanic proverbs such as had just been collected at this time in 'Alfred's sayings',—too much love, he says, distorts the truth.[4] These reflections have their place among the great number of didactic comments which break into the flow of the narrative throughout his work.[5] Laȝamon's references to sources are confined to frequent allusions to 'the boke' and 'the spelle', without giving any more specific definition as to their nature, and no proper literary technical terms occur. There are no references to individual authors, apart from the well-known short list at the beginning, which contains a reference to St. Austin, Bede, and Wace.[6]

In the course of the thirteenth century the demand for an uninterrupted flow of narrative is generally too strong to admit of interruption by reflective observations. The poets are absorbed by the story itself; the problem of the truth of their romances does not draw any comment

[1] l. 22955. [2] l. 22975. [3] ll. 22987 ff.

[4] The anonymous interpolator (*c.* 1190) inserts into William of Malmesbury's *De antiquitate Glastoniensis ecclesiæ* the same rebuke that the Celts clung too strongly to their infatuated hope for Arthur's return: 'Ipsum expectant adhuc venturum, sicut Judaei Messiam suum . . .' (Brandenburg, *op. cit.* p. 6).

[5] Among the successors of Wace only Robert Mannyng of Brunne has connected statements about the truth of his narrative with the story of the Round Table, although Pierre de Langtoft, who, of his sources, was nearest to him in time, has left them out. Robert Mannyng, whose chronicle contains many references to authors and sources, has kept closer than Laȝamon to the critical character of Wace. This comment, moreover, is interesting as praise of Geoffrey of Monmouth (ed. Furnivall, ll. 10579 ff.).

[6] No list of authors occurs in the extant version of Wace. Imelmann, *Laȝamon, Versuch über seine Quellen* (Diss. Bln. 1906) refers to the lost expanded version as source. Madden (notes to I 55, II 3) suggests Old English examples and points to Alfred's preface to his translation of the *De consolatione.*

from them. The assertion of truth now generally takes the form not of reflections about veracity but of references to sources, chiefly to the particular kind of source (geste, chronicle, romance). References to individual authors seem to be found only in two romances, *Sir Tristrem* and *King Alisaunder*. English romance of the thirteenth century has no comments which compare with the critical allusions of Wolfram or Gottfried von Strassburg to their predecessors and contemporaries. The reference to Thomas of Erceldoune in *Sir Tristrem* appears to be the only reference to a contemporary poet to be found in English thirteenth-century romance.

Many references to authors occur in *King Alisaunder*, which abounds in learned observations.[1] In the list of authorities[2] for the marvels of the East—taken over from the French source *Roman de toute chevalrie*[3]—the poet names his 'shewers', 'maisters', and 'clerkes', convinced as he is that he is no 'finder'. It is characteristic of the reference to authorities as a pseudo-historical device that we find it in the Alexander material, which shows 'truth and fiction . . . inextricably interwoven'.[4] In this list pagan and Christian authors are quoted side by side, whereas other forms of mediaeval history of literature distinguish clearly between *literatura* and *scriptura*.

In classical literature reference to authors as sources is confined to scientific works. It found its way into pseudo-historical prose, though not into epic narrative, in late antiquity. The application of this originally scientific, and afterwards literary, device to epic narrative is mediaeval, as also is the introduction into romance of the list of authorities.

Sometimes the two types, the assertion of truth and the list of sources, are correlated, as in the matter of Troy. With the subject-matter of the Trojan war is closely connected the development of the proem, containing long reflections on fiction and the facts of history. In late antiquity the tendency to expose Homer as a 'liar' was prevalent, and this was imitated by the long line of authors of Troy-romances, who desired to set pagan mendacity in contrast to their own veracity. This anti-pagan spirit is most strongly developed in Guido de Columnis, who equated distortion of facts with the heathen appetite for *fictio* and *fabula*. He gives a long list of authors and assesses their merits in regard to their representation of truth. He expands Pseudo-Dares' and Benoît de Sainte-Maure's proem and gives it theoretical depth by

[1] Kölbing presumed a common author for *King Alisaunder*, *Richard Coer de Lyon* and *Arthour and Merlin*, but in the two other romances learned digressions are hardly to be found: references are made only to the romance and the *brout*, not to individual authors; so that in this respect *King Alisaunder* stands alone.

[2] Laud MS. 622 ll. 4756-4781; ed. Weber, ll. 4772-4797.

[3] The dependence is discussed by Th. Hildebrand in *Die altfranzösische Alexanderdichtung. 'Le Roman de Toute Chevalrie' des Thomas v. Kent und die mittelenglische Romanze 'King Alisaunder' in ihrem Verhältnis zueinander* (Diss. Bonn 1911).

[4] M. Braun *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature* (1938) p. 33.

his conception of 'fictio'. He attacks Homer and Ovid for their interweaving of truth with fables, so that it was the task of later writers 'verum a falso separare'. Lydgate adopted this anti-poetical and anti-pagan spirit wholeheartedly.

It is characteristic of the formulas of assertion and reference as pseudo-historical devices that they are to be found in the Troy, the Alexander, and the Arthurian cycles. Where literary invention is hidden under the veil of history, where facts and fancies are inextricably interwoven, there is the soil in which fictitious devices may flourish.

II

But there was one poet who freed himself from this spell, Chaucer. Conceiving that poetic imagination constitutes a realm with its own innate rights, he realized the distinction between science and history on the one hand, and poetry on the other. The second book of *The Hous of Fame* and *The Nun's Priest's Tale* are landmarks in this process of separation. Thus the use of the mediaeval devices of asserting the truth and referring to sources can now be restricted. Moreover, these formulas impeded the flow of the narrative and had to be given up for the sake of balance. *The Knight's Tale*, the longest of the Canterbury Tales, has only four short references to sources, and in the narrative frame of many of the Canterbury Tales there is simply no place for that kind of pedantry which refers to authorities in a work of fiction.

A strong element of literary criticism, sharpening into parody, pervades the second book of *The Hous of Fame*. In the second book many things point to the fact that here Chaucer criticizes the mediaeval tendency to lend verisimilitude to creations of fantasy by building them upon the foundations of contemporary science and to refer to authorities for the verification of fantastic or symbolic regions. It must, however, be admitted that *The Hous of Fame* is of a multi-coloured pattern in which many elements mingle. As the history of its interpretation indicates, the question 'What is the House of Fame?' cannot be answered by a single explanation that covers all elements, and the element of criticism and parody can only be described as a part of this pattern.

These critical comments are connected with the detailed description of the House of Fame (ll. 710-852), which leads to a discussion between Chaucer and the Eagle concerning the latter's methods of reasoning (ll. 853-886). Chaucer first describes 'wher she [*sc.* Fame] dwelleth' in ll. 711-724, which are based upon Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Essential for the description is the fact that (l. 713):

> Hir paleys stant, as I shal seye,
> Right euen in middes of the weye
> Betwixen heuene, erthe, and see.

On account of this situation 'in so juste a place', every word, every

sound must necessarily travel to the House of Fame. It is only this very general description that was taken over from Ovid.

In the long discourse in ll. 710-852 the Eagle tries, with all the scientific means at his disposal, to give an empirical foundation to this allegorical description. All the physical lore of the time is ransacked to bring allegory into the solid realm of the 'propre skile' (l. 726),[1] of 'resoun' (l. 708), and of 'experience' (l. 688). So the question arises how to give verisimilitude to the allegorical notion of the audibility of every sound in the House of Fame. Chaucer himself distinguishes between 'imagynacioun' (l. 728), which here apparently corresponds to 'resoun', and 'fantasye' (l. 992), which is fancy.[2]

The Eagle sets about his didactic dialogue (or rather monologue) by maintaining:

> . . . that can I preue
> By resoun, worthy for to leue.[3]

He ends his discourse by priding himself on the fact that he gives

> . . . swiche skiles
> That he[4] may shake hem by the biles,
> So palpable they shulden be.[5]

And the crowning evidence will be the 'preue by experience'[6] on their arrival.

The 'skiles' given are drawn from the common lore of the Middle Ages. Isolated, divorced from their context, Chaucer of course took every word of these theories of sound and gravity seriously, but there are sudden little interruptions interspersed throughout the whole scholarly discourse, as well as the Eagle's analysis of his conclusion,[7] which clearly indicate that Chaucer cannot have been quite serious in applying this immense scientific apparatus to an allegory. Behind this learnedly constructed 'demonstracioun' there must hide an ironical purpose. Lounsbury[8] remarks, how 'he abruptly holds himself up, and makes a half-sarcastic comment upon his own performance'. In the same way asides in which he criticizes the work of others are interspersed throughout his work. In the second book of *The Hous of Fame* the following comments betray his ironical intention. In his discourse the Eagle, asserting that everything lovers say to each other is heard in the House of Fame, asks with all the zeal of the anxious teacher, 'Unethe maistow trowen this?' (you hardly will believe it?),[9] and Chaucer answers:

> 'No, helpe me god so wis!'—
> Quod I. 'No? why?' quod he. 'For hit

[1] The term 'skile' is frequently used by Chaucer in this discourse; one could paraphrase it as 'sound statement produced by discerning judgment'.

[2] But in *The Miller's Tale* 'fantasie' and 'imagynacioun' are used alternatively; there 'imagynacioun' also means fantastic thought, fancy, as in l. 3612. 'Men may dyen of ymaginatioun' (cf. *Tatlock's Concordance to Chaucer*). The usage of 'imagynacioun' in *The Hous of Fame* is explained by the O.E.D. as 'operation of the mind generally, thinking'. [3] l. 707. [4] The lewed man.
[5] l. 867. [6] l. 878. [7] ll. 853-888. [8] *Studies in Chaucer* iii (1892) 326. [9] l. 699.

Were impossible, to my wit,
Though that Fame hadde al the pyes
In al a realme, and al the spyes,
How that yet she shulde here al this,
Or they espye hit.'

And full of the excitement of the challenged disputant the Eagle, who apparently had aimed at provoking this remark, replies, 'O yis, yis! . . . that can I preue by resoun'. In expounding how 'every . . soun . . . Moot nede come to Fames House',[1] the Eagle adds, 'Thogh hit were pyped of a mouse'; and, involved in his 'gret prolixitee', passionately exclaims:

And who-so seith of trouthe I varie,
Bid him proven the contrarie.[2]

After having fully developed his 'propre skile', the Eagle's reasoning ends with:

Take hit in ernest or in game.[3]

That this should be the climax of the Eagle's 'worthy demonstracioun' betrays the fact that Chaucer cannot have meant the Eagle's discourse to be taken quite seriously. In the midst of all the ponderous erudition these little remarks point to the real meaning. Quite clearly the Eagle's self-analysis[4] shows the ironic purpose. In the following well-known passage the Eagle questions Chaucer:

Have I not preued thus simply
Withouten any subtiltee
Of speche, or gret prolixitee
Of termes of philosophye,
Of figures of poetrye,
Or colours of rethoryke?[5]

Questioned in such an overpowering way all Chaucer can answer is a meek 'Yis'. Now the Eagle rejoices triumphantly in his 'palpable skiles' and assures Chaucer that he will have before evening 'of euery word of this sentence a preue'. As though he cannot take leave of his favourite topic, the Eagle asserts once more:

And with thyn eres heren wel
Top and tail, and euerydel,
That euery word that spoken is
Comth into Fames Hous, y-wis,
As I haue seyd; what wilt thou more?[6]

Now, as so frequently in Chaucer's work, there is a sudden abstention ('stinte al this!') from learning:

By seynt Jame!
Now wil we speken al of game.

[1] l. 783. [2] l. 806. [3] l. 822. [4] ll. 853-886. [5] ll. 854 ff. [6] ll. 879 ff.

and to change the subject entirely, the Eagle asks him 'How farest thou?'

These interruptions, as well as the self-analysis, clearly indicate that this whole application of scientific means to an allegory cannot be meant in full seriousness.

It does not seem to have been noticed that elements of parody are hidden throughout the second book of *The Hous of Fame*. A contrast between the long-winded scientific prolixity and something buoyant and rallying that borders upon parody had been felt.[1] Lowes pictures Chaucer 'reading, at times, with *mischievous delight*, a batch of those portentously stately and solemn narratives of aerial excursions for which the Middle Ages had a curious appetite.'[2] The Eagle's self-analysis has been discussed by Florence L. Teager[3] and she sees 'in the light of Manly's and Rickert's conclusions a more definitely *ironical* cast.' But she regards the Eagle's queries as 'pertinent not to the soundness of his theories but to the matter of style'. Her interpretation is concentrated upon ll. 853-869 without setting them in relation to the second book as a whole. The Eagle's inquiry into his own methods is not isolated, but is a part of the critical discussion which runs through the whole of the second book. Of the terms examined by F. L. Teager, 'figures of poetrye'[4] and 'colours of rethoryke' refer, of course, exclusively to the style, but 'gret prolixitee of termes of philosophye' refers to the copiousness and minuteness of detail, and 'subtiltee', though defined as 'subtiltee of speche', surely covers also the mental process of carrying out such a careful discrimination on fine points that it might come near to abstruseness; ll. 867 ff. discuss only the 'skiles' and the 'conclusioun' and are thus exclusively related to the method of conducting the argument.

By claiming to be free from 'subtiltee' and 'prolixitee', the Eagle seems to point out—in direct irony—the dominating characteristics of his own speech. Some scholars complain of the wearisome length of the Eagle's scientific discourse. But it may be suggested that this quality is intended: the Eagle personifies certain traits typical of the mediaeval attitude and shared also by Chaucer, though he feels gradually moved to abandon them. To the Eagle's didactic monologue he merely answers 'Yis', but an outline of his own opinions, as opposed to the Eagle's, emerges in the course of the second book, and the personalities of Chaucer and the Eagle are drawing asunder.

The Eagle stands for the mediaeval ignoring of the boundary between science and poetry. He shows contempt for poetical fancies[5]—

[1] A. Kissner *Chaucer in seinen Beziehungen zur italienischen Literatur* (1867); A. Rambeau 'Chaucer's House of Fame in seinem Verhältnis zur "Divina Commedia" ' *Englische Studien* III.

[2] *Chaucer Lectures* (1934) p. 109.

[3] 'Chaucer's Eagle and the Rhetorical Colours' *P.M.L.A.* XLVII 410. [4] l. 858. [5] l. 991.

'Lat be', quod he, 'thy fantasye', and asks Chaucer, 'Wilt thou lere of sterres aught?' But Chaucer refuses:

> 'Nay, certeinly', quod I, 'right naught;
> And why? . . .'

Chaucer's whole manner has changed: he has given up the 'Yis' and clings to his views in the most insistent way; his answers now seem to imply impatience. The Eagle courteously entreats him to consider that Astronomy is also of importance to the poet:

> 'Yis, pardee', quod he; 'wostow why?[1]
> For whan thou redest poetrye,
> How goddes gonne stellifye
> . . . . .
> Castor, Pollux, or Delphyn,[2]
> Or Atlantes doughtres seuene,
> How alle these arn set in heuene;
> For though thou haue hem ofte on honde,
> Yet nostow not wher that they stonde.'

But Chaucer does not yield the point:

> 'No fors', quod I, 'hit is no nede:
> I leue as wel, so god me spede,
> Hem that wryte of this matere. . . .'

Here a poetic attitude which refuses to mingle science with poetry, and sees poetry as a realm of its own, is definitely adopted for the first time in English literature. Poetry and science are torn asunder.

That the second book of *The Hous of Fame* contains an attack upon a poetic attitude felt by Chaucer to be of the past is still more clearly conveyed by his parody of the mediaeval device of reference to authorities, to names, moreover, which were venerated in the Middle Ages as a source of truth:[3]

> And than thoughte I on Marcian,
> And eek on Anteclaudian,
> That sooth was hir descripcioun
> Of al the heuenes regioun,
> As fer as that I saw the preue;
> Therfor I can hem now beleue.

Here the mediaeval genus of 'aerial excursions' (Lowes) is mocked at by a poet who is moving towards the poetic perception of Reality. The whole class of literature which tries to describe imaginary regions in too distinct and detailed a way is exposed to ridicule. Chaucer himself in the Eagle's description of the House of Fame gave an example of the 'aerial excursion', but this continuous chain of critical

[1] ll. 1000 ff. [2] l. 1006.

[3] ll. 985 ff. In *The Merchant's Tale* l. 1732, there is also a depreciatory reference to Martianus Capella; cf. H. Korsch *Chaucer als Kritiker* (Diss. Bln., 1916).

comments throughout the second book shows in what spirit it is meant.

Chaucer was, of course, not alone in his criticism of the attitude of the past. In contemporary Italy Petrarch openly expressed his aversion to Dante and violently attacked 'dialecticorum inanem et contentiosam petulantiam'. Chaucer ridiculed the weary 'conclusiouns' of the disputatious Eagle; Petrarch, in his letters, the 'conclusiunculas' of that senile sect of philosophers who ride childishly on the hobby-horse of dialectics.[1] 'Nihil dialectico sene deformius', he exclaims. 'Et si syllogismos eructare coeperit, fuge!', he warns his friend. In the same letter there is a disparaging reference to 'dialecticorum agmini Britannico'. Criticism of this kind may have suggested Francesco Landini's vision of William of Occam lamenting the fate of 'nostrae artes', which were now exposed to persecution.[2]

Chaucer's parody of a too-well-informed description of the heavenly regions, with authorities to vouch for its scientific reliability, runs parallel to the train of sceptical comment upon the tendency in poetry which gives rein to the descriptive powers in picturing purely imaginary realms.[3] Reserve takes hold of him when he speaks of Arcite's death:

> His spirit chaunged house, and wente ther
> As I cam neuer, I can not tellen wher.
> Therefor I stinte, I nam no diuinistre;
> Of soules finde I nat in this registre,
> Ne me ne list thilke opiniouns to telle
> Of hem, though that they wryten wher they dwelle;[4]

And the same restraint appears in the Prologue of *The Legend of Good Women:*

> A thousand sythes have I herd men telle,
> That ther is joye in heuen, and peyne in helle;
> And I acorde wel that hit be so;
> But natheles, this wot I wel also,
> That ther nis noon that dwelleth in this contree,
> That either hath in helle or heuen y-be,
> Ne may of hit non other weyes witen,
> But as he hath herd seyd, or founde hit writen;
> For by assay ther may no man hit preue.

So also in other works of Chaucer we find this critical attitude towards a too detailed representation of imaginary realms.

But the twofold aspect of this criticism of an attitude of the past is not to be forgotten. Reverence for Boethius does not prevent Chaucer from using his name ironically;[5] enthusiasm for Dante's work does not

[1] *Epistolæ de rebus familiaribus*, ed. F. Fracassetti lib. I 6; see also H. W. Eppelsheimer *Petrarca* (1926).
[2] E. Norden *Die antike Kunstprosa* (1909) II 744.
[3] E. Kellett 'Chaucer as a critic of Dante' in *Suggestions* (1923).
[4] *Knight's Tale* l. 2809.
[5] *Nun's Priest's Tale* l. 4431.

exclude parody of a literary genus of which Dante was the greatest exponent. There is thus a quality about the second book of *The Hous of Fame* which is typical of parody: the author is still attached to the subject to be parodied, yet feels that his development urges him in other directions. So he treats ironically what is now a thing of the past for him, without losing any of his love for it.

In the second book of *The Hous of Fame* the element of parody lay hidden, but in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* it becomes more evident. Its object is still the same: to establish the boundary between knowledge and poetic imagination.

Chaucer's recognition of the intrinsic rights of the imagination enables him not only to curtail pseudo-historical devices, such as reference to sources and assertion of the truth, but even to dismiss them with irony.

It has been seldom emphasized that this tale is at the same time a 'speculum', into which are woven a multitude of allusions of rhetoric, poetics, and other branches of knowledge. The surprising copiousness of references to sources and lists of authors, the constant raising of the question of the best authority, the whole manner of taking the complex of source and authorities so seriously, appears especially striking when contrasted with the narrative style of the other Canterbury Tales. The longest tale of this cycle, *The Knight's Tale*, contains only four short references to sources, which—apart from the reference to Statius—mention only books or stories in general; nor would it be in the character of the 'parfit gentil knight' to overburden his tale with ponderous 'matere'. But in the short *Nun's Priest's Tale*, a tale of 'a cok and hen', about twenty references to sources occur and the number of authors mentioned is extraordinary. All the allusions to dream-lore, medicine, the art of divination, etc., are in keeping with a style of disputation which would have done credit to any schoolman, and the range covered by the references to sources is surprising. They include the Old Testament, Roman literature, the Fathers, later ecclesiastical writings, legends, the Physiologus, treatises on poetics, metrical romances—a wider field of references than can be found anywhere earlier in English literature. But all this knowledge is uttered by 'a cok and hen', and, even if there were no other sign, the buoyant ironical tone of the whole would indicate that all this learning is introduced for the sake of parody. Then the question arises, how far the tone of the tale is in harmony with the character of the teller, a question of importance in the interpretation of every Canterbury Tale. According to the hints at the priest's vitality and gift of observation (epilogue ll. 46 ff.) he seems well qualified to satisfy the host's request: 'Tel us swich thing as may our hertes glade'. As for the learned allusions, it was only natural to put a story so full of them into the mouth of a 'clerk'. 'And so may I shewe you by story, and also by

ensampull of kende, and also of gestes', says a fifteenth-century preacher.[1] Thus the tale, interspersed with many exempla, is influenced by the usage of the pulpit, and is in harmony with the Nun's Priest's occupation. This tale was neither meant nor announced as preaching; a 'moralitee', nevertheless, is drawn at the end. The priest was asked to contribute a 'mery tale', and merry it is, but at the end the listener is warned:

> But ye that holden this tale a folye,
> As of a fox, or of a cok and hen,
> Taketh the moralitee, good men.
> For seint Paul seith, that al that writen is
> To our doctryne it is y-write, y-wis.
> Taketh the fruyt, and let the chaf be stille.[2]

The stories of the drowned and the murdered man are plainly exempla: such is the fate of those who do not pay attention to God's warnings. This tale is pervaded by a deep seriousness and behind the veil of the fable 'as of a fox, or of a cok and hen' a problem of vital importance to Chaucer is discussed, namely, the relation of free will to Providence.

So we are warned not to conceive this fable *corporaliter* but *spiritualiter* like 'al that writen is',[3] and this tendency of Chaucer's interpretation is mediaeval. Also modern judgment regards this story as 'mery', but it must be recalled that *The Tale of Melibeus*, as well as *The Parson's Tale*, are announced as 'mery'.[4]

This spirituality, connected with an erudition such as could have been acquired only by a perfect 'clerk', is clothed in the garb of a 'mery fable', and this furnished Chaucer at the same time with a means of reducing clerical 'subtiltee' *ad absurdum*. Even a name like Boethius is brought into ironical play.[5] The controversy of Pertelote and Chauntecleer concerning Providence and Free Will tells more explicitly than *The Hous of Fame* where historical examples of the faults of 'subtiltee' and 'prolixitee' are to be found:

> Witnesse on him that any perfit clerk is,
> That *in scole* is gret altercacioun
> In this matere, and greet disputisoun,
> And hath ben of an hundred thousand men.
> But I ne can not bulte it to the bren,
> As can the holy doctour Augustyn,
> Or Boece, or the bishop Bradwardyn.[6]

[1] G. R. Owst *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (1933) p. 150.
[2] l. 4628.
[3] The question whether Chaucer interpreted his Canterbury Tales *corporaliter* or *spiritualiter*, is raised by H. Glunz *Die Literarästhetik des europäischen Mittelalters* (1937) p. 352. The English for *spiritualiter* was 'goostely': 'Now goostely to speke', says the fifteenth-century preacher quoted by Owst *op. cit.* p. 150.
[4] *Mery* has also the obsolete meaning 'pleasing, pleasant, sweet'; the special meaning it has in Chaucer is treated by Glunz *op. cit.* p. 355.
[5] ll. 4431 and 4484. [6] ll. 4425 ff.

And then Chaucer makes one of his sudden and typical interruptions to protect himself from the 'subtiltee' of the disputation:

> I wol not han to do of swich matere:
> My tale is of a cok, as ye may here.[1]

Lines 4110-4346 represent a carefully constructed disputation. There is no doubt that the subject—dreams as warnings of Providence—was in itself taken seriously by Chaucer, but the over-nice dialectic method, put into the mouths of barndoor fowls, leaves no doubt that a parody is intended. The reference to sources is an important device for achieving this effect. In this academic disputation—quite in the style of mediaeval universities—Chauntecleer, the defender, evokes a whole army of authorities from all regions of the realm of spirit against the one authority of his opposer. References to pagan and Christian material are mingled, in the manner of the list of authorities described above.

As in *The Hous of Fame*, the ponderous disputation finds its end in a 'conclusioun', in which Chauntecleer insists upon not touching the poisonous purgatives. Such is the outcome of all this erudite argumentation, and then again there is the abrupt revulsion from all learning:[2] 'Now let us speke of mirth, and stinte al this'.

The whole attitude of *The Nun's Priest's Tale* clearly reveals Chaucer's recognition of the intrinsic rights of the imagination. At the very beginning the key-note to the realm of the fable is given:

> For thilke tyme, as I haue understonde,
> Bestes and briddes coude speke and singe.[3]

This recognition of the fable as a separate genus occurs in English literature (so far as I know) for the first time in Chaucer. The fable is now taken back to the dim remoteness of mythical time, just as Chaucer uses the definition 'in tholde dayes of the King Arthour' (in *The Tale of the Wyf of Bathe*) to remove his story into the distant past, into the uncertain time of fairy-tales:

> In tholde dayes of the King Arthour
> Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
> Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.
> The elf-queen, with her joly companye,
> Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede:
> This was the olde opinion, as I rede.
> I speke of manye hundred yeres ago;
> But now can no man see none elves mo.[4]

Centuries of English romance had taken the utmost pains to lend verisimilitude to the image of King Arthur, but here is a new narrative principle, to represent fable and romance as what they really are.

[1] ll. 4441. [2] l. 4347. [3] l. 4070. [4] D. 857 ff.

This new attitude was bound to bring about a gradual disentegration of the mediaeval pseudo-historical devices such as assertion of truth and reference to sources. Chaucer attacks these two devices together:

> . . . and Chauntecleer so free
> Song merier than the mermayde in the see,
> For Phisiologus seith sikerly,
> How that they singen wel and merily.[1]

Just such a fantastic statement would have driven the mediaeval poet to assert its truth and refer to authorities. Chaucer's own former practice enabled him to hit upon the very place most liable to parody, for true literary parody can only be based upon the most exact knowledge of the matter to be parodied.

Another mock reference to the truth of the romance of Lancelot leaves us in no doubt about its ironical purpose:[2]

> Now euery wys man, lat him herkne me;
> This storie is also trewe, I undertake,
> As is the book of Launcelot de Lake,
> That wommen holde in ful gret reverence.

The realm of poetry has now a value of its own. Pseudo-historical devices—of ancient lineage—have become superfluous, and this new spirit of irony comes forth to liquidate them.

Mill Hill. H. L. Levy.

[1] l. 4459 ff. [2] l. 4400.

Lebenslauf

Am 31. Dezember 1912 wurde ich, Heinz Ludwig Levy, als Sohn des Rechtsanwalts Dr. Arthur Levy und seiner Ehefrau Elise, geb. Misch in Berlin geboren. Ich besuchte die Vorschule und das humanistische Gymnasium (Lessing-Gymnasium zu Berlin) 1920-1932 und studierte 1932-1937 Anglistik und Germanistik an der Universität Berlin. Ich besuchte auch Vorlesungen und Seminare auf den Gebieten der klassischen Philologie, Philosophie und Geschichte.

Meine Lehrer waren die Herren Professoren, Dozenten und Lektoren: Schirmer, A. Huebner, W. Huebner, Horn, Jaeger, Norden, Hartmann, Spranger, Oncken, Caspar, Guardini, Reinhold, Galinsky, Scherer, Walzer, Pender, Aikin-Sneath, Robson-Scott,

Infolge der akademischen Gesetze der Nationalsozialisten konnte ich als Jude nicht weiterstudieren, erhielt aber von der Universität Basel die freundliche Erlaubnis, meine Studien dort zu vollenden. Ich besuchte 1937-1939 auf den Gebieten der Anglistik, Germanistik und Kunstgeschichte Vorlesungen und Seminare der Herren Professoren Lüdeke, Muschg, Gantner, Schmidt, Altwegg. Vorliegende Arbeit wurde unter Herrn Prof. Schirmer begonnen und weiterhin von Herrn Prof. Lüdeke gefördert. Allen meinen Lehrern bin ich für meine Ausbildung zu tiefstem und immerwährendem Danke verpflichtet.